

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 PC-01 OC-06 CCO-00 ACDA-07 OPR-02

EUR-12 EB-08 AGRE-00 DHA-02 COME-00 /099 W

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9584

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ACCRA

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0668

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, MILI, DM

SUBJ: BENIN INTERNAL SITUATION

REF: A. COTONOU 557, B. COTONOU 396, C. COTONOU 612

SUMMARY: POPULAR DISCONTENT APPEARS TO BE GROWING AS CORN AVAILABILITY DECLINES. GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) ONCE AGAIN HAVING APPARENT DIFFICULTY RECONCILING SOCIALISM AND SORCERY. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH SITUATION IN COTONOU APPEARS CALM, THERE ARE RUMORS OF GROWING UNDERCURRENT OF POPULAR OPPOSITION TO GOVERNMENT OF PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) REVOLUTIONARY POLICIES, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO FOOD SHORTAGES. CORN (MAIZE), THE STAPLE OF THE SOUTH OF BENIN WHERE TWO THIRDS OF THE POPULA-
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TION LIVE IS IN SUCH SHORT SUPPLY THAT GPRB HAS GREAT DIFFICULTY KEEPING ANY STOCKS IN GOVERNMENT OUTLETS WHILE BLACK MARKET PRICE HAS RISEN TO CFA 25 PER KILO. GIVEN AVERAGE WAGE IN COTONOU OF CFA 10,000 (APPROX \$40) PER MONTH AND AN ESTIMATED NORMAL MONTHLY CONSUMPTION OF 100 KILOS FOR A FAMILY OF FOUR, INCOMES WOULD HAVE TO BE INCREASED BY 150 PER CENT MERELY TO FEED FAMILY NORMAL DIET. ALTERNATIVES (PRINCI-

PALLY RICE) ARE AVAILABLE, BUT ALTERING A TRADITIONAL DIET IS DIFFICULT. THUS COTONOU IS FULL OF GLUM FACES AND HUNGRY PEOPLE.

2. WE HAVE HAD SEVERAL REPORTS THAT MARKET WOMEN, WHO ARE BACKBONE OF TRADITIONAL COMMERCIAL SYSTEM, ARE BEGINNING TO ORGANIZE TO OPPOSE GPRB MARKETING POLICIES. IT WAS THIS BODY WHICH CREATED LAST CIVIL DISTURBANCES AND ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS FOLLOWING MURDER OF INTERIOR MINISTER AIKPE IN JUNE 1975. MEETINGS BEGUN IN SAVALOU AND DJOUGOU AND HAVE APPARENTLY SPREAD TO DASSA-ZOUME AND ABOMEY, THE REGION WHERE THE CORN SHORTAGE IS THE GREATEST. IF REPORTS ARE TRUE, ONE CAN EXPECT OPPOSITION TO INCREASE AS CORN AVAILABILITY DECLINES.

2. GPRB HAS SUFFERED SETBACK WITH DEATH OF ISSA ABDOULAYE, PREFECT OF THE ATACORA PROVINCE, FOUNDER OF THE PARTY AND ONE OF KEREKOU'S MOST IMPORTANT ADVISORS ON PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU. ABDOULAYE DIED APRIL 1 AFTER NEARLY SIX WEEKS IN COMA FOLLOWING AN AUTOMOBILE ACCIDENT, AND WAS GIVEN A HERO'S FUNERAL CEREMONY ON APRIL 2. ALTHOUGH THERE IS NOTHING TO INDICATE THAT HIS DEATH WAS NOT ACCIDENTAL, THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS CIRCULATING THAT HE DIED UNDER "MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES." PERHAPS THE VICTIM OF WITCHCRAFT.

3. WHILE THESE ARE MERELY RUMORS, GPRB DOES SEEM TO BE TAKING SERIOUS NOTE OF PUBLIC CONCERN. IN AN UNUSUAL EDITORIAL APRIL 6 IN THE GOVERNMENT DAILY EHUZU, THE WRITER STATES THAT "IT SEEMS AS THOUGH A DEMONIC FORCE IS STRUGGLING TO ERECT SUDDEN OBSTACLES WITH THE DARK AIMS OF TRYING TO COMPROMISE PREVIOUS SUCCESSES AND BREAK THE DETERMINATION OF THE PEOPLE BY CONFIDENTIAL

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SOWING FATALISTIC DISCOURAGEMENT AMONG THEIR RANKS". THE ARTICLE THEN ACCUSES INTERNATIONAL IMPERIALISM AND LOCAL COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES OF CAUSING THESE SETBACKS THROUGH THE JANUARY 16 MERCENARY ATTACK AND BY SPREADING "CYNICAB AND PERVERSE" REMORS CONCERNING THE DEATH OF ABDOULAYE. ARTICLE ALSO MAKES FREQUENT MENTION OF THE DEATH OF CONGOLESE PRESIDENT NGOUABI, AND DENIES REPEATEDLY THAT "FATALISM OR MYSTERY" PLAYED A ROLE IN HIS DEATH OR THAT OF ABDOULAYE. EDITORIAL CONCLUDES WITH AN APPEAL TO THE PEOPLE TO ARM THEMSELVES IDEOLOGICALLY TO BLOCK THIS COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY CAMPAIGN.

4. COMMENT: REFERENCE TO FATALISM AND MYSTERY ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTING SINCE DESPITE ALL GPRB EFFORTS TO NEUTRALIZE THE POWER OF THE FETICHEURS (TRADITIONAL SORCERERS), BELIEF IN MAGIC POWERS IS STILL WIDESPREAD. DAHOMEY/BENIN IS THE HOME OF VODOO, AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE VARIOUS CULT CHIEFS REMAINS STRONG. FETICHERS HAVE PREVIOUSLY BEEN ACCUSED OF PURPOSELY HOLDING OFF THE RAINS IN ORDER TO SPOIL CROPS AND EMBARRASS THE GOVERNMENT. AT ONE POINT IN 1976 KEREKOU, WHILE DENOUNCING

SUPERSITIION AND MYSTIFICATION, WARNED THAT ANY FETICHEUR FOUND TAMPERING WITH THE WEATHER WOULD BE SEVERLY PUNISHED. AMONG A SUPERSTITIOUS PEOPLE, THE DECLINE IN FOOD PRODUCTION WHICH HAS OCCURRED SINCE KEREKOU LAUNCHED HIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST SORCERY, MAY NOT BE SEEN AS A COINCIDENCE, AND MIGHT INDICATE THAT TRADITIONAL RELIGION IS STRONGER THAN THE NEW IDEOLOGY.

5. REFERENCE TO NGOUABI'S DEATH ARE ALSO OF INTEREST SINCE CONGOLESE PRESIDENT'S ASSASSINATION HAS SPARKED RUMORS THAT SOME BENINESE MIGHT BE CONTEMPLATING SIMILAR ACT, PERHAPS USING FETICHEURS, WHO SPECIALIZE IN POISONING. KEREKOU APPARENTLY HAS TAKEN NGOUABI'S ASSASSINATION VERY MUCH TO HEART AND NOW TAKES EXTRAORDINARY SECURITY MEASURES, SEALING OFF WHOLE AREAS OF CITY FOR HOURS BEFORE HE TRAVELS ALONG ANY GIVEN ROUTE. HE IS ALSO BUILDING HIGH WALLS COMPLETE WITH GUN PORTS AROUND HIS PRIVATE RESIDENCE. HIS UNEASINESS WAS ALSO APPARENT WHEN HE WAS GIVEN THE GOLD MEDAL OF HONOR AT THE RECENT AFRO-ASIAN CONFIDENTIAL

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PEOPLE'S SOLIDARITY ORGANIZATION MEETING IN COTONOU. WE WERE TOLD BY AN EYEWITNESS THAT RATHER THAN WEAR DECORATION HE QUICKLY REMOVED RIBBON AS IF IT WERE A NOOSE. PERHAPS HE RECALLED THAT PREVIOUS TWO GOLD MEDALS WERE AWARDED TO ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT HEAD TEFERI BANTI AND CONGOLESE PRESIDENT MARIAN NGOUABL. THOMPSON

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